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ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN PROMOTING HIGH POTENTIAL TOURISM SPOTS AND PRODUCTS IN PERAK TENGAH

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Abstract

The promotion of tourism sector is vital to ensure all existing and new potential areas can be explored successfully. This paper highlights the issues, and challenges in promoting the tourism sector in Perak Tengah. The promotional activities should be organized by all stakeholders which are inclusive of all relevant agencies and local operators. This study applied a qualitative approach through interviews conducted with all relevant agencies to examine the real issues of tourism sector and the development of future enhancements efforts in encouraging and stimulating the tourism sector in Perak Tengah.

Keywords: Tourism Products, Perak Tengah, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors which is able to significantly contribute to a nation's economic growth. It also provides 10.4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 9.9% of employment in the world (Idris et al., 2021). In Malaysia, tourism is one of the biggest contributions to the country's economic growth (Idris et al., 2021). It helps in creating job opportunities for the locals and introducing the local attraction spots to the tourists (Eugenio-Martin et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2016). However, the promotion of tourism in certain areas would be a challenging task for the local authority due to the absence of facilities, readiness of the operators and accessibility to the area (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015; Yoo et al., 2017). This paper emphasizes the promotion issues and challenges faced by the authorities in Perak Tengah. Perak Tengah has many potentials for tourism and some of which are still undiscovered and unable to be introduced. In this study, the issue and problems at the tourist spots are also highlighted and commented to improve the visibility and ability of the areas to be promoted. At the same time, the government promotional tools and strategies are also investigated to ensure that the local authorities have a clear direction and appropriate promotional tools to expose Perak Tengah at the greater scale. The vast development of technology must be utilized in supporting this intention.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Tourism is the biggest contributor to the Malaysian economy. Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) is the responsible authority in managing and implementing all the policies related to tourism development in Malaysia. Local authority is responsible to prepare the proposal for tourism promotions within their administration area. Tourism Malaysia through their branches in every state in Malaysia is one of the agencies that play an important role to introduce the tourist attractions locally and internationally. Hence, a top-down approach has been implemented in tourism sector development in Malaysia. There are many factors in enhancing the tourism area including the accessibility, facilities and amenities provided to support the tourism industry at the area (Borràs et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2017; Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015). The operators and the tourism site themselves must be well prepared to accept the influx of tourists and offer consistent and interesting activities. The promotional activities also need to be executed aggressively through multiple mediums. The utilization of new information technology should be emphasized and fully adopted for this purpose (Sigala, 2018). The information must be readily available and can be accessed easily and quickly for the tourists (Huang et al., 2017). Rahimi et al., (2020) argued that the tourism promotional activities should not depend on the information technology alone but the conventional tools such as brochures are still relevant and should still be enforced. Nevertheless, internet

accessibility would be the biggest challenge for the implementation of information technology for tourism promotional purposes. Therefore, both conventional and new technologies can be utilized successfully in tourism promotional activities.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the qualitative method was adopted as the focal methodological approach. This approach involves in-depth interviews which are conducted with a few experts to obtain their opinion. Audio and video recordings were used as supporting instruments to record each interview session. Both instruments are essential to ensure that all the conversations were collected properly and reduce the loss of vital information during the session. Perak Tengah was selected as the case study and a few key stakeholders were identified for the interview. The interviews were focused on the issues, challenges, and potential of tourism in Perak Tengah which is one of the districts in Perak with a huge number of attractions., Unfortunately the number of visitors is still low. Hence, the focus of this paper is on further investigation into the tourism sector in this area. The other topics like the lists of attractions, tourism operators in Perak Tengah and existing activities were excluded from the discussion in this paper.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Perak Tengah district has been selected as a case study for an investigation on challenges faced by tourism in the area. As one of the districts in Perak located at the heart of the State, Perak Tengah is an established area and is also known as the education city where major universities namely Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, and Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) are located. With all the existing allure, it is disappointing that this vicinity is one of the districts with low numbers of tourism activity in Perak. In fact, Perak is one of the most visited states in Malaysia which had accounted 21.1 million visitors in the 2019 (Department of Statistic, 2020). There are a lot of existing and newly found tourism attraction areas which need aggressive promotion. Even in their local plan, tourism promotion is the focus of the local authority (Perak Tengah District Municipal). Bandar Seri Iskandar in Planning Block of Bota is the central point for Perak Tengah and main economy activities and administration are placed in Bandar Seri Iskandar. Nevertheless, the promotional activities are still slow and need a lot more efforts. There are eleven (11) Planning Blocks in Perak Tengah namely (1) Belanja, (2) Layang, (3) Bota, (4) Lambor Kanan, (5) Lambor Kiri, (6) Pulau Tiga, (7) Kampung Gajah, (8) Pasir Panjang Hulu, (9) Pasir Salak, (10) Bandar and (11) Kota Setia as shown in Figure 1.1 below.



Figure 1: Planning Block Distribution in Perak Tengah

The interview data were transcribed thematically based on the promotion and marketing and Challenges of Promoting Tourism Products literature. The interview sessions involved seven (7) experts and key players of the tourism industry in Perak. These individuals were interviewed to obtain their opinion regarding the promotion of Tourism in Perak Tengah. Details from the interviewees are tabulated in the Table 1.1 below:

Table 1: Respondent’s Backgrounds and Positions

RS	Agencies	Positions
1	MDPT	Director of Tourism Unit Perak Tengah District Council
2	KPLB	Penghulu Tertinggi Daerah Perak Tengah
3	Muzium Pasir Salak	Muzium Pasir Salak Curator
4	MOTAC Perak	MOTAC Director
5	Tourism@Perak	Tourism Marketing Officer

Table 2: Synthesis of interviews questions regarding promotion issues and challenges in Perak Tengah

Promotion and Marketing		
No	RS	Answers
A1: Roles of Organization	1	Our organization is responsible to promote and manage the tourism products in Perak Tengah.
	2	Our organization is not responsible specially in tourism; however, it supports the local operators or entrepreneur especially in the rural areas for economic development and facilities as well as infrastructures.
	3	We are an organization which assists state government such as Tourism Perak, to carry various functions of tourism in Perak Tengah as we do have facilities. However, we are indirectly promoting the tourism in terms of educating and giving knowledges to the public on local cultures and traditions in Museum.
	4	Our organization plays an important role in tourism since we have implemented the policy and strategy from the federal government. At state level, we have three main sectors which are administration, license, and enforcement, and Industrial and infrastructures.
	5	Our organization is under Perak State Government, and we collaborate with several agencies (MOTAC and Local Authorities), and we play big roles in promoting tourism in Perak.
A2: Organization Plan for tourism	1	We also help in managing the local operators to get financial support, training and encounter some problems in terms of land ownership and any technical department related to tourism products in Perak Tengah.
	2	Our organization is helping the remote areas in terms of accessibility, infrastructures and helping the locals for economic developments.
	3	We are welcoming the public, government, private sectors, or researchers to come to visit the museum. Some of the events are usually meant for education such as schools' visits, researchers, and projects which are initiated by the government or private sectors. <i>Lembaga Muzium Negeri Perak</i> is responsible in conducting and promoting the whole Museum in Perak.
	4	The license and enforcement sectors are responsible for managing licenses for accommodations such as hotel and homestays, tour guide, travel agents and tourism bus. Meanwhile, Industrial and infrastructures is specially for Malaysia Tourism Quality Assurance (MyTQA) as an

Promotion and Marketing		
		initiative of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) to raise the level of facilities services and quality for Malaysian tourism products. It honours tourism goods and encourages industry participants to place a premium on the calibre of their offerings.
	5	We are managing the tourism promotion for Perak State under the state government.
A3: Promotion Campaign	1	We are ready to establish our tourism logo for Perak Tengah. This logo is a good campaign for tourism Perak to introduce us a tourism destination in Perak. We will insist on our local operators to use our logo for their businesses.
	2	Our organization does not contribute to the tourism promotions. However, we are sometimes being invited by tourism agencies to participate in the events and meet ups when those agencies need any information. However, we have never specifically been called up or set up as a tourism organization.
	3	We had organized some events such as <i>Temasya Budaya</i> . The events always attract the public to come and visit Perak Tengah especially to Kompleks Pasir Salak.
	4	We are an organization which facilitates the policy and strategy from the federal government, but we are not responsible for promotions. However, we usually provide support financially such as in terms of facilities, licenses, training and more which indirectly contribute to tourism promotions. We have several Grants to implement tourism activities such as The Tourism Sector Matching Grant (GSSP) that aims to focus on the organization of tourism programs/events by the private sector, players, and activists' industry.
	5	We also join some agencies especially exhibitions to promote our tourism products in Perak such as at MAHA, <i>Hari Bertemu Pelanggan Kerajaan Negeri Perak Siri 5 Tahun 2022</i> and any activities that are related to tourism in Perak.
A4: Promotion tools	1	As for now, we are using the social media to introduce our tourism products using our official social media and website of Perak Tengah District Councils. In future, we want to establish a page separately from our domain websites and to specifically focus on tourism promotions and activities in Perak Tengah. Others, we also collaborate with tourism agencies in Perak such as Tourism@Perak, to help promote our tourism products and they have started to promote some of them such

Promotion and Marketing		
		<p>as Kopi Mesin, Pulau Misa and more. Then, we also support Perak Pass application which is organized by Tourism@Perak.</p> <p>Besides that, Perak Tengah has become the highlight for Fam Trip, a familiarization trip to promote Perak, besides two other districts such as Kampar and Lenggong. To be in this line, it is also a good move for us to be more active in promoting our tourism products.</p>
	3	<p>We are depending on <i>Lembaga Muzium Negeri Perak</i> and Tourism@Perak for promotion such as in Facebook or any social media platforms. Kompleks Pasir Salak is well-known as this is the first icon for tourism in Perak Tengah. However, we also contribute to certain events and activities for the public which are supported by the state government.</p>
	5	<p>In terms of tools, we are using brochures, news, and social media platforms such as FB, Instagram and Tik Tok.</p> <p>Recently, we are using Perak Pass applications as a promotion tool which captures all tourism products in Perak including in Perak Tengah of which some merchants will offer several vouchers to the public.</p> <p>Meanwhile Perak Pass Plus, advocates digitalization of the travel industry in Perak. It provides a platform for sellers to promote their products and offers multichannel payment.</p>
A5: Policy & Strategy	1	<p>In terms of policy and strategy, we are working on some strategies which have been established. It is true, that Perak Tengah District may lack written strategy for tourism in terms of policy and strategy. However, we need to collaborate with other stakeholders to ensure that we are not left behind from other districts.</p>
	3	<p>We relied on <i>Lembaga Muzium Negeri Perak</i>, to determine themes for museums in Perak. Kompleks Pasir Salak theme, for instance is warriors in Perak and <i>Tanah Melayu</i>. We are also responsible in preserving the local culture and heritage such as identifying and clarifying royal tombs in Perak Tengah, as well as clarifying facts of any discovery within Perak.</p> <p>In addition, in terms of budget and financial support, this institution only can make suggestions on budgets and reports for maintenance for further actions at local and state level.</p>
	5	<p>Previously, we helped the merchandiser such as Kellie's Castle, Muzium Pasir Salak, accommodation and services to give out vouchers. This encourages the tourist to come and visit and help the operators to run their business. Now, we are</p>

Promotion and Marketing		
		moving to Perak Pass Plus applications, where the operators give vouchers to the buyers.

Challenges in Promoting Tourism Products in Perak Tengah		
No	RS	Answers
B1: Potential Products	1	Pulau Misa, is one of the tourism products which are unique in Perak Tengah. Pulau Misa themes is Malay culture. Nowadays, there's a lot of activities had been offered to the tourist who comes to visits.
	2	Parit town in Mukim Belanja, is one of tourism location in Perak Tengah and Pulau Misa.
	3	Kompleks Pasir Salak is one of iconic of Perak Tengah that well known in Perak. Indeed, it is an existing product that should be developed and preserved.
	4	There are many existing and potential products in Perak Tengah especially in terms of heritages and cultures. For example, royal tombs in Perak Tengah should become one of iconic tourism products if there are any efforts such as tourism trails.
	5	Pasir Salak.

No	RS	Answers
B2: Preservations	1	We as an agency is responsible to ensure this product stay unique and preserved. We have Key Performing Index (KPI) or level of measurement to ensure that these products are ready, and their quality is maintained. Hence, we keep visiting the local operators and making sure that they are keeping their quality. Besides, we also engage with the community and ask them to collaborate with us especially for cultural activities. For example, we highlight Malay cuisines in Perak Tengah such as Bubur anak Lebah: in terms of culture, we promote Rebana performances and more. Other efforts involve the promotion of our SME's products.
	3	We need new management and regular maintenance for Kompleks Pasir Salak as well as for accommodations operators and the amphitheatre in Pasir Salak.

No	RS	Answers
B3: Infrastructure	1	There are some of tourism destinations that are built on private properties, and some do not have proper entrances or facilities. However, we are assisted by several tourism agencies, especially by MOTAC for financial support. With this, it is hoped that the tourism products could attract the tourist to come and visit Perak Tengah.
	2	Infrastructure and facilities are very important for tourists convenience. However, we need to make sure Perak Tengah is ready for infrastructure and facilities.
	3	Some buildings in Komplek Pasir Salak are not in good condition and others may not be safe for the public to come and visit.
	4	We have spent a lot on facilities and infrastructures; however, some projects do not show significant improvements.

No	RS	Answers
B4: Achievement	1	Many among the public recognize and know about our tourism products in Perak Tengah. There are many tourists who have come to visit especially to Pulau Misa.
	3	As for now, the pandemic has caused a serious drop in the number of visitors who come to the museum. Previously, we have had collaborations with Tourism@Malaysia and homestays with the help of voucher to encourage tourists to come and visits.
	5	We could see many activities are carried out to encourage people to come to Perak Tengah. Recently, Hari <i>Aspirasi Keluarga Malaysia</i> and several sports are held here to boost tourist arrivals to Perak Tengah.

No	RS	Answers
B5: Method to promote lesser-known products.	1	At first, we had to approach the local operators who had the potential products. Then, we try to convince the local operators to give a good package for activities, planning of tourism, and giving them financial support planning. These will make them feel assured to follow our planning and become a successful tourism product.
	2	Promotion is very important. Nowadays flyers and posters are not the only promotion. People are promoting through mass media, social media such as application Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok. Hence, tourism packages should be introduced for tourism in Perak Tengah.

	4	The promotion in Perak Tengah is unsatisfactory. Promotion plays a vital part in terms of promoting lesser-known areas. For example, we have several places in rural areas in Perak, these places emerging even though the places are far from the main cities such as Kampung Beng, Lenggong.
	5	There are many methods to promote the tourism products, which usually involve these lesser-known products which are unique to certain places. We can cluster the products in terms of culture, heritages, and handicrafts. Then, we will promote them, and include them in our itinerary/trail/ our websites and tools for tourism in Perak.

No	RS	Answers
B6: Challenges	1	<p>Firstly, shortage of staff in the organization. In Perak Tengah District Councils, our Tourism Unit is established since 2021 (1 year). Since then, there is no additional staff for our unit. Secondly, the issue is in financial support. We have to seek financial support from tourism agencies especially from the federal government. However, there are many competitions between districts to get those financial support. Because of that, we need the potential products that are interesting and compatible to compete with other products.</p> <p>Besides, there are issues of training of local operators, in terms of management, financial planning, certificate and legalization of their products. These matters if we want to have successful tourism destination. We have to plan for local operators to be introduced and this involve those training for year 2023. We are also very thankful to Tourism@Perak which has helped to organize a main domestic training to our boat operators in Sungai Perak: they are trained for management and safety management while handling boat trip business.</p> <p>Lastly, another issue we face is in collaborations between local operators. These operators need to help us to promote Perak Tengah as one of tourism destinations, rather than promoting their own products. That's why we design a logo for tourism in Perak Tengah to promote tourism in this area.</p>
	2	<p>Firstly, if there are any additional roles in the future specially for tourism in our organization, the challenges are of the lack of staff to carry out their duties. There will be few questions such as who will drive this group? And what are the roles for tourism that we need to tackle?</p>

		As for now, our organization only helps the remote areas in terms of accessibility, infrastructures and helping the locals for economic developments.
	3	<p>Firstly, lack of staff in the organization. We do not have enough staff to manage the museum itself especially for the position of Curators or a person who could guide for exhibition in museum. If we put another additional role for promotion team, then it will challenge us more.</p> <p>Secondly, financial support. We had to find out the financial support from tourism agencies and we are specifically receiving support from <i>Lembaga Muzium Negeri Perak</i>: however, it is usually insufficient to fully support the systems in Pasir Salak Museum as the budget will be usually provided and distributed for other museums in Perak as well.</p>
	4	Collaborations between stakeholders. There are several agencies and units we need to approach to make sure our collaborations are successful. However, the different backgrounds and working nature requires time and planning to make decision. However, it is important for us making sure that these stakeholders are not working in silo.
	5	<p>We are managing the tourism promotion for the whole Perak state, so we need collaboration from every district. We also have a team for marketing and promotion to focus on our goal. Currently, we are working on a project known as Fun Map. This project requires support from tourism organization by local authorities, to create a map that shows point of interest in every district to promote their tourism products. From there, we will attract several travel agencies to make packages for every district. I think collaborations and support is really need and there are challenges to find good terms.</p> <p>In addition, compatible tourism products in terms of convenience, facilities such as parking, surau and toilets need to be provided by the operators before we decide to promote their products.</p>

No	RS	Answers
C4: Challenges to leap into VR	1	Tourism arrivals and tickets selling.
	3	Understanding the functions of the institutions. There are many gaps, and unsatisfactory level of understandings between agencies especially for roles and functions in Perak Tengah. For example, the history of Perak Tengah or Pasir Salak is not in our field as we only restore based on themes for Warrior in Tanah Melayu such as Dato' Maharajalela.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Table 1.2 shows a few similarities between the agencies. These are associated with (1) promotion tool which is used in promoting tourism products and activities in Perak Tengah. All interviewees had mentioned that the conventional way of promotion was utilized including the preparation of brochures and news. The agencies were also utilising their websites and Facebook as promotional medium. All those methods were not able to capture the public's attention especially among the youngsters. Idris et al., (2021) suggested that the most effective promotional tools for tourism sector are using the most famous and favourable social media influencers and utilisation of information technology systems. The use of new information technology plays a vital role to facilitate the tourism development and all their stakeholders in gaining actual information about tourism destinations including the facilities, accessibility and amenities available (Borràs et al., 2014; Idris et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2017). Other similarities that were mentioned by all the interviewees were the readiness of the infrastructures as well as the local tourism operators. All the infrastructures were not delivered sufficiently. The issues of ownership had become one of the constraints in providing and maintaining the infrastructure. In addition, the agencies will not be able to provide the infrastructure in the private tourism area without the permission of the operators. Sadly, there are some private tourism areas which were provided with the infrastructure, but the operator failed to maintain it and it fully relied on the government agencies and budget. In different cases, the agencies have furnished the tourism areas with the infrastructure and facilities but unfortunately, the number of tourists who visited the area was still low. Hence, the infrastructure and facilities in the tourism areas should be equipped after the effective promotional works have been done. This means that, the infrastructure and facilities should come after the demand by the tourist to ensure the investment made by the agencies is worthwhile. Providing adequate infrastructure and facilities crucial at the tourism area is essential since they support the tourists' needs (Idris et al., 2021).

As mentioned above, the readiness of the operators is one of the main challenges in tourism promotion activities as it is crucial to ensure that there are a steady stream of activities and products which are produced and maintained by the locals. In Perak Tengah, the tourism operators are fully dependent on the budget from the agencies and the government. After the budget is approved and allocated to them the operators are not serious about the activities and products. Continuous monitoring activities need to be done by the agencies to ensure the operators are maintaining their business. Regrettably, all agencies involved in this sector are facing a shortage of staff for monitoring purposes. For example, Perak Tengah District Council has only one staff for Tourism Department and while the same officer also belongs to the Planning Department.

Based on the discussion above, there are few recommendations that can be proposed. Firstly, the utilisation of new technology system such as virtual reality for tourism purposes (Idris et al., 2021). The virtual reality will function as a fundamental instrument which will be able to provide essential information about the tourism area such as the search for basic information about the tourism site including photos and videos to experience it, hotel and homestay reservation as well as various other needs (Huang et al., 2017). Secondly, the provision of facilities should be focused on after an effective promotional campaign. The information about the basic facilities can be included into the virtual reality (Huang et al., 2017). Lastly, effective classes and benchmarking visit can be organised by the local agencies and authority to spark the interest of local tourism operators and make sure the operators are ready for any consequences from the tourism activities. This benchmarking visits can also give an effective motivation to them.

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